



Australian Red Cross
THE POWER OF HUMANITY

protecting people

**international
humanitarian
law**



CRISIS CARE COMMITMENT

International Humanitarian Law

Armed conflict is a tragic reality of the modern world, as it has been since ancient times. During times of war, injury, loss of life and the destruction of property are inevitable. However, the international community has acknowledged that there are limits, even to warfare, and has developed rules that protect those not taking part in the fighting and that restrict the way wars are fought.

These rules, known as international humanitarian law (IHL), the laws of war or the law of armed conflict (LOAC) are primarily found in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005. All nations of the world have now accepted the four Conventions as binding upon them under international law.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has specific responsibilities under the Geneva Conventions. Australian Red Cross wants you to know more about these international agreements for a number of reasons:

- Throughout the world the Movement is committed to ensuring that the victims of war are protected. By ensuring more people know about IHL, the Movement hopes that the effects of war will be minimised and the degree of suffering in the world reduced.
- Australia has ratified numerous treaties relating to IHL. To ensure Australia fulfils its obligations, it is important that all sectors of the community understand and champion the cause of IHL, both nationally and internationally.
- Members of the Australian Defence Force are ever more likely to serve overseas as part of peacekeeping and other missions,

and need to know their responsibilities.

- Australians are increasingly travelling overseas for business or tourism, and should know what their rights are if they are caught up in armed conflict.
- Every day Australians watch television and read about overseas events. Issues of IHL such as war crimes are very topical and it is in the interest of the public to have an understanding of these subjects.

The law states that governments must spread knowledge of IHL as widely as possible and grants the Red Cross a mandate to help in this task. Australian Red Cross has been requested to assist the Australian government in 'spreading the word'.

For information on Red Cross events, seminars, resources and ways volunteers may become involved, please contact the IHL program, Australian Red Cross, in your capital city. (For contact details, refer to the back page.)



An ICRC delegate talks to an Australian soldier on exercise in Queensland about IHL. Photo: Australian Red Cross

Front cover: An Iraqi woman and her child moments after soldiers raided their house. Photo: AFP/Roberto Schmidt

The contribution of Henry Dunant

Rules of war have existed across all cultures and religions since the earliest times. Often they were informal understandings and principles, codes of chivalry and honour, or ad hoc agreements negotiated on the battlefield. Modern IHL is different, in that the customs of war have been written down and formally agreed to as international law by nation states.

This idea began on 24 June 1859 in Solferino, a town in northern Italy, where French, Italian and Austrian troops were fighting. After only a few hours 40,000 people were left wounded or dead. The sight of the sick and wounded appalled Henry Dunant, a Swiss businessman travelling in the region. He set about helping them, regardless of their nationality, and called on the local population to join him with the rallying cry 'Tutti fratelli' ('All men are brothers').

On his return to Switzerland, Henry Dunant, unable to forget the horrors he had witnessed, wrote a book called 'A Memory of Solferino' proposing measures to limit the suffering in wartime. Dunant's book led to the creation of a five-member commission, which, in 1863, became the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

In 1864 the ICRC succeeded in persuading the Swiss Government to convene an international conference. Sixteen countries participated and the tangible result was the First Geneva Convention. This treaty, for the 'Amelioration of the Condition of the

Wounded in Armies in the Field', was agreed to by 12 nations.

The red cross on a white ground, the reverse of the Swiss flag, became the international emblem of protection, and the identifying symbol of a new worldwide organisation of neutral volunteers. Thus, from the very beginning, the Red Cross Movement and IHL have been inextricably linked and have developed side by side.

The Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols

There are over 570 sections, called Articles, set out in the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols. Each Convention has a specific area of protection:

- First Convention: Protects wounded and sick members of the armed forces on land, the medical personnel attached to the armed forces who care for them, medical equipment, transports and sites. Religious personnel are also protected. Adopted in 1864;
- Second Convention: Protects wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of the armed forces at sea, and their medical and religious personnel. Adopted in 1906;
- Third Convention: Protects prisoners-of-war (POWs). Adopted in 1929;
- Fourth Convention: Protects civilians in enemy territory or in territory under occupation.

In 1949, when the fourth Geneva Convention was adopted, the first three were revised and aligned into the form in which they are found today. Thus they are the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949.

Nearly three decades later, two Additional Protocols were created to provide increased protection for victims of war, especially civilians. IHL needed to be kept up to date with the weaponry and tactics of modern warfare, especially those used in post-colonial conflicts.

- Additional Protocol I: Covers international armed conflict (fighting between two or more countries, or wars of national liberation). It adds to the protections of the Fourth Geneva Convention – for example protecting the environment, prohibiting attacks on civilian items necessary for them to survive (for example, water) and prohibiting certain methods of warfare, like starvation of the civilian population.
- Additional Protocol II: Applies in times of internal armed conflict or civil war. Both Protocols were adopted in 1977.
- In 2005 Additional Protocol III was adopted. It adds a third emblem of protection for situations of armed conflict. The red cross and red crescent were now joined by the 'red crystal' - a red frame in the shape of a square on edge on a white background.

When does IHL apply?

When armed conflict breaks out the Conventions and Protocols apply in varying

degrees depending on whether the conflict is of an international or internal nature. However, in all conflicts the following acts are prohibited: murder, rape, torture, corporal punishment, outrages against personal dignity, taking of hostages, collective punishment, executions without trial and cruel and degrading treatment of people.

The emblems



Central to the whole system of IHL is the particular significance of the protective emblems on a white background – the red cross, red crescent and red crystal.

As the international emblems of protection in armed conflict, they designate medical relief and care for the wounded on all sides. Medical units, including hospitals, tents, depots and stores which display one of these emblems, are protected and should not be attacked. On the other hand, misuse of an emblem (eg firing from the surrounds of a marked hospital) results in protection being lost.

Unfortunately, misuse means that members of the military may be less likely to observe or trust an emblem in the future. Deliberate misuse (eg carrying armed troops on a hospital ship) is called perfidy, a serious war crime. The red cross emblem is also vital in protecting International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegates as they move through zones of conflict. Indeed

the emblem is their very protection, since the organisation's neutrality means their staff cannot carry any weapons nor be accompanied by armed escorts.

As early as 1876 some nations objected to the use of the red cross, mistakenly believing it to be a Christian symbol. These nations adopted the red crescent as an alternative. Its use as a protective emblem was recognised in 1929 and is now also governed by the Geneva Conventions and Protocols.

In 2005, an additional emblem of protection known as the red crystal was adopted for use in situations where neither the red cross nor the red crescent is accepted as a neutral emblem. When displayed on the armband, hospital, aircraft etc, the red cross, the red crescent and the red crystal carry exactly the same legal protection.

In Australia it is a criminal offence to use any emblem of protection without permission from the Minister for Defence. Even Australian Red Cross is restricted in its use of the emblem. Because the red cross is far more than a logo, trademark or brand, Australian Red Cross can only use it in a small 'indicative' sense to mark the activities and work of the national society. Doctors, pharmacists, businesses and advertisers are not permitted to use the red cross as a sign for hospitals, surgeries, first aid kits or any health or 'helping' products. The red cross may be a symbol of medical activity, but only in the very specific circumstances of armed conflict and only for authorised personnel.

Who is protected?

Wounded, sick and shipwrecked combatants are individuals no longer capable of taking part in the conflict. They should not be attacked if they have laid down their weapons. Sick and wounded combatants must be searched for, collected and treated humanely. They must receive, to the fullest extent possible, the medical attention and care required by their condition. No distinction or priority of medical treatment should be made other than on medical grounds. Not treating a wounded soldier because he is the enemy is illegal.



Australian Army medical personnel give first aid. Photo: Australian Defence Force

Bodies must be identified and death confirmed (if possible by medical examination) before burial or cremation. Grave sites are to be marked and maintained.

Medical and religious personnel are non-combatants who are to be respected and protected at all times. Medical personnel include those exclusively assigned (on a permanent or temporary basis) to medical services. This includes those directly involved in delivering medical aid (doctors, nurses, stretcher-bearers and orderlies)



Civilian buildings damaged by shelling in Gaza. Photo: ICRC

as well as administrators, cooks, drivers and the like, provided they are specifically assigned to medical units.

Religious personnel, whether military or civilian, includes those of all faiths – chaplains, monks, mullahs and rabbis – who are dedicated to the exercise of their ministry. To receive protection they must be attached either permanently or temporarily to the armed forces, a medical unit or a civil defence organisation.

All such personnel wear a water-resistant band on their left arm. It bears one of the distinctive emblems of protection, and is

issued and stamped by the relevant military authority. Such personnel also carry a special water-resistant identity card which states in what capacity the individual is entitled to protection. They may carry small arms for their own defence or the defence of those in their care, but must not involve themselves in offensive military activity.

Medical and religious personnel captured by the enemy do not become prisoners-of-war. While 'retained' they should be allowed to continue their impartial medical duties. If they are not needed they should be returned to their own side.

Prisoners-of-war

The people entitled to prisoner-of-war status include:

- members of national armed forces
- members of military groups (including organised resistance movements), provided that they are commanded by a person responsible for subordinates, wear a distinctive sign, bear arms openly and follow the laws and customs of war
- the crews of merchant ships and civil aircraft
- combatants, such as guerrillas, provided they carry arms openly during each military engagement. They must be visible to the adversary during military deployment before an attack in which they are to participate
- persons who accompany the armed forces without actually being members, such as supply contractors and accredited war correspondents.

Persons who do not have, or lose, the status of prisoner-of-war are:

- combatants who do not carry arms openly
- spies captured in civilian clothes or wearing the uniform of the enemy
- mercenaries.

The rights of prisoners-of-war in international armed conflict are set out in the Third Geneva Convention. In broad terms they have the right to be humanely treated - including the right to adequate food, shelter, medical care, exercise and recreation,

communication with their families, visits from the ICRC, and repatriation as soon as the conflict is over. They must be protected from violence, torture (physical or psychological), reprisals, being forced to do military tasks for the enemy, insults and public curiosity. These points and many others, such as those about discipline and punishment, the organisation of POW representatives and command structure, are set out by the law in considerable detail.

It is important to note that protection for detainees in internal armed conflict also exists but the legal provisions of Additional Protocol II are far less detailed. During internal conflict the ICRC is often able to negotiate access into detention facilities around the world using its 'right of initiative'. Common Article 3 ('common' because it is repeated in each of the four Conventions) sets out the minimum or base-line standards to be applied in all circumstances and in both international and internal conflict. Red Cross considers categories such as 'illegal combatant' to describe someone who is detained as unhelpful. No one who is detained falls outside the boundaries and protections of IHL.

Civilians

As people taking no active part in hostilities, civilians in times of armed conflict are entitled to fundamental rights and guarantees. Murder, torture, violence or mutilation of civilians is forbidden, as are physical or psychological attacks against their health, dignity, or religious practices. Civilians should not be directly targeted or taken as hostages. Conversely, they should not be used to shield military objectives or moved to an area to make it exempt

from military attack. Their property should be respected. Women and children are provided with special protection. Rape and indecent assault are forbidden in all circumstances.

On the other hand, bearing relief supplies such as food, medicines and clothing should be given free and unimpeded access. In particular, the humanitarian activities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement should be allowed to continue unhindered. The reunion of dispersed families and the exchange of family news should be facilitated by the parties to the conflict and using the vast international networks of the Movement.

Written in 1949, with the experience of occupied Europe in mind, the fourth Geneva Convention deals with civilians in enemy hands. There are two categories which include:

- Civilians in a foreign country who have the right to leave unless their departure is against national interests;
- Civilians whose country has been occupied, and who should be allowed to continue their lives as normally as possible.

If, for security reasons, it is necessary to intern people, they must be held in conditions similar to those of POWs. This means that people may be moved from their homes to live in a residential area or camp where they can be supervised.

Thus, civilians in occupied territory, civilians under their own governments and civilians in both international and internal conflicts are all covered. Even with the undeniable and appalling suffering experienced by civilians in war zones every day, most IHL commentators believe that the existing

protections are adequate. It is not that any more law is needed – rather greater compliance with, and enforcement of, the current provisions.

Methods and means of warfare



An ICRC medical team provides emergency surgical treatment in Sudan. Photo: ICRC/Boris Heger

In addition to providing protection for victims of war, IHL, in particular Protocols I and II, provides limitations on the ways war can legally be fought.

Many of these rules stem from the Hague Conventions, treaties negotiated at the end of the 19th Century at a series of military and peace conferences in The Hague, Netherlands. Over time, and especially in

the Additional Protocols of 1977, the two streams of 'Geneva Law' and 'Hague Law' have become entwined. With their different emphases (how to protect non-combatants, versus how combatants must fight fairly) they are essential and complementary pillars of IHL.

Some key principles for combatants

- Attacks must not be indiscriminate, but must be directed solely at military objectives. In order to protect the civilian population, military installations should not be located near densely populated areas.
- Attacks must fulfil the criteria of 'military necessity'. That is, they must make an 'effective' contribution to military action and offer a 'definite' military advantage. Collateral damage and destruction (especially to civilians/civilian property) should be avoided and commanders must have reliable intelligence before launching attacks where damage to civilians may occur.
- Weapons and methods of warfare likely to cause unnecessary suffering are prohibited.
- Chemical and biological warfare have been banned, as has the use of blinding laser weapons.
- It is prohibited to starve the civilian population, to destroy objects essential to their survival, or to cause widespread, long-term or severe damage to the environment.
- Cultural and historic objects, installations containing dangerous forces (e.g. nuclear power stations), and neutral zones where civilians and civil defence personnel can shelter are given special protection, and provision is made for their marking and identification.
- On the ground, soldiers are issued strict rules of engagement which clearly define issues such as orders for opening fire and

the appropriate use of force. They may also carry printed cards to remind them of their obligations under their rules of engagement.

Rules for combatants

A simple set of rules for members of the armed forces is:

- Be a disciplined combatant. Disobedience of the laws of armed conflict dishonours you and your defence force and causes unnecessary suffering.
- Fight only enemy combatants and attack only military objectives.
- Destroy no more than your mission requires.
- Do not fight enemies who are out of combat or who surrender. They are protected. Disarm them and hand them over to the appropriate authority.
- Collect and care for the wounded and sick - friends and enemies alike. Priority must be given only on medical grounds.
- Treat all, whether civilians or enemy forces, with humanity.
- Prisoners must be treated humanely. Torture, whether physical or mental, is strictly prohibited.
- Do not take hostages.
- Do not carry out retaliatory acts against protected enemy personnel or objects.
- Respect all persons and objects marked with the emblem of the red cross, red crescent, red crystal or the white flag. Never use the emblems inappropriately.
- Respect other people's property - looting is prohibited.
- Prevent any breach of the above rules. Any breach of the laws of armed conflict is punishable.
- Report any breach of the laws of armed conflict.

The role of the Red Cross in times of armed conflict

International humanitarian law sets out the mandate of, and the authority for, the ICRC and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in times of conflict.



Near Moscow, Russian soldiers train in the rules of engagement. Photo: ICRC/Fred Clarke

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

- Provision of medical care: equipment, blood supplies, field hospitals and clinics, surgical, nursing and rehabilitation teams.
- Provision of material aid and emergency relief to civilians: food, shelter, clothing, establishment of water and sanitation programs.

- Visits to persons deprived of their liberty in their places of detention: delegates interview prisoners, without any witnesses, register details and arrange the exchange of personal family messages. They check and try to improve the material and psychological conditions of prisoners, but never pass judgement on the reasons for the detention.
- Running a central tracing agency: Tracing officers search for persons who have disappeared and assist the families who have no news of their relatives. They arrange for the exchange of family messages when normal channels of communication have broken down and, where possible, organise family reunifications.
- Conducting IHL education programs worldwide to inform members of the armed forces as well as civilians about the law.

Further to these specific roles, the ICRC has a 'right of initiative' under the Geneva Conventions. This gives the ICRC the formal right to offer to undertake any humanitarian activity to protect war victims, subject to the consent of the nations involved. Under this initiative, the ICRC has been able to visit, register (and thus protect) many security and political detainees around the world, even though those visited did not strictly have legal status as POWs.

The Geneva Conventions also allow for the appointment of a 'Protecting Power' - a neutral party to the conflict which scrutinises the activities of states and safeguards their interests. The ICRC has sometimes undertaken some of the tasks of a Protecting Power - for example, by bringing States together to facilitate POW exchanges or



An ICRC delegate visits a place of detention in Chechnya. Photo: ICRC/Paul Grabhorn

negotiating the establishment of safe havens. In all these ways, the ICRC is the guardian and promoter of International Humanitarian Law.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The Federation promotes co-operation between National Societies at the international level. In the field the Federation co-ordinates and mobilises relief assistance for international emergencies. Its work focuses on four core areas: promoting humanitarian values, disaster response, disaster preparedness and health and community care. During a conflict, the Federation supports the work of national societies that provide direct relief to those affected.

National Societies

National Societies may be called on to act as auxiliaries to the medical services of the armed forces in times of armed conflict. For example Australian Red Cross can act as an auxiliary to the medical services of the Australian Defence Force should additional resources be required. Traditionally Australian Red Cross has also undertaken non-medical

duties to assist sick and wounded troops—providing basic comforts and organising leisure activities and family contact.

How is IHL enforced?

The responsibility for enforcing IHL lies first and foremost with each of the 194 nations that have ratified the Geneva Conventions – that is, every nation in the world. In most cases when a country adopts the Geneva Conventions it must pass its own domestic legislation providing penalties for violations of the rules. The most serious violations are called 'grave breaches'. Grave breaches include torture and inhumane treatment of POWs and civilians, the taking of hostages and the conduct of scientific and biological experiments.

Australian legislation

Under the *War Crimes Act 1945*, and until 1951, nearly 300 war crimes trials were conducted. Most of these trials were held in northern Australia and the Pacific region, involving crimes allegedly committed by Japanese troops. The *War Crimes Amendment Act 1988* enables the Australian

Government to prosecute people now resident in Australia and suspected of having committed war crimes in Europe during World War II.

In 1957 the Australian Government enacted the *Geneva Conventions Act*. This Act, together with the *Geneva Conventions Amendment Act 1991*, the *Criminal Code 1995* and *International Criminal Court Act 2002*, provides the legal framework for the trial and punishment of anyone committing grave breaches of the laws of war either in Australia or elsewhere.

Military law

Members of the armed forces are governed by military law which requires them to carry out the legal orders of a superior. However, if a member of the armed forces carries out an order which violates the law of armed conflict, that member and the member who gave the illegal order may be held responsible for their actions. Combatants are expected to be aware of, and to resist, an order which is blatantly illegal. The defence of superior orders ('I was told to do it...') may mitigate a sentence but is not considered an excuse.

A significant change occurred with the creation of Additional Protocol I. For the first time, a strong emphasis was placed on the responsibility of commanding officers. A commanding officer ordered to commit a grave breach must not pass on or carry out the order and must therefore have sufficient knowledge to judge what is and what is not a violation. Further, a commander is personally responsible for the behaviour of subordinates. Being away from the scene and claiming not to know about their conduct is insufficient defence. The training of military personnel in

this branch of military law is vital. If the Conventions are to be respected and complied with, the rules - both the soldier's rights and responsibilities - must be known and understood. In Australia, IHL is incorporated into training programs for all levels of the armed forces and into military manuals. Australian Red Cross complements the Australian Defence Force training by offering a range of courses, lectures, brochures and materials, and by active participation in military exercises.

Application to UN personnel

On 12 August 1999 (the 50th anniversary of the revised Geneva Conventions of 1949), the Secretary - General of the United Nations issued a directive that IHL applies to all forces, including peacekeepers, under UN command. This was a significant step in raising the international profile of IHL and the seriousness with which the United Nations views it.



A woman surveys the remains of victims of Rwanda's 1994 genocide, preserved where they were killed at Ntarama's Roman Catholic Church. Photo: ICRC

War crimes tribunals

The international military tribunals in Nuremberg (1945) and Tokyo (1946) at the end of World War II tried the major cases

against the Nazis and the Japanese. Though often criticised as examples of 'victors' justice' ('It's only the winners who try the losers') the trials were an important step in the development of international law.

Since World War II, there have been other notable cases. Adolf Eichmann was tried in Israel for his Nazi activities, and American Lieutenant William Calley was tried by the United States for his actions at My Lai, South Vietnam. These, however, are the exceptions. It was not until the 1990s that the international community doubled its efforts to end widespread impunity for breaches of the law.

In 1993 and 1994 the United Nations Security Council established two tribunals to try certain crimes alleged to have been committed in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. Though plagued by problems such as difficulty gaining reliable evidence and bringing suspects into custody, these two ad hoc tribunals are still successfully hearing cases and handing out significant punishments, some at very high levels.

International Criminal Court

After 50 years of debate and three years of negotiation, a Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was adopted on 17 July 1998 and entered into force on 1 July 2002.

Established in The Hague, the Court may hear cases referred by a State Party, by the Security Council or by the independent Prosecutor. The Court has the power to try any individual from any level - a soldier, a commander, a civilian, a Head of State and so on - for the most serious violations - war crimes, crimes against humanity and

genocide - in both international and internal armed conflict. In 2010 a Review Conference renewed international efforts to define the crime of aggression. At June 2010, 111 nations, including Australia (this figure is constantly updated on the ICRC website) had agreed to be bound by the operation of the Court. This means that there are more than 100 countries where ICC investigations would be facilitated, and where alleged war criminals cannot run and hide.

The very first case to be heard before the ICC is the trial of the Congolese warlord, Thomas Lubanga, charged with recruiting and using children under the age of 15 in his military forces. Indictments are being issued and investigations launched into matters in a growing number of countries. While the Court has no death penalty, sentences of up to 30 years may be given, or even a life term for extremely grave crimes. Prison space will be offered by various nations that are party to the Court.



An ICRC delegate briefs Nigerian soldiers on IHL before their peacekeeping mission to Darfur. Photo: ICRC/Boris Heger

Notwithstanding the creation of this permanent international body, the obligation to prosecute remains first and foremost with the individual States. It is only if they are 'unable' or 'unwilling' to prosecute that the ICC will have jurisdiction to hear a case. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent

Movement is strongly supportive of all efforts to bring war criminals to justice and was involved in the debates leading to the creation of the International Criminal Court. The ICC is an independent court - not run under UN auspices, and certainly not by Red Cross.



A man holds up a canister of a de-activated cluster munition in Lebanon. Photo: ICRC/M Kovic

The trust which all parties have in the ICRC's neutrality, and the unique access that ICRC delegates have to victims, means that delegates keep information obtained in the course of their missions in strict confidence and they may not be compelled to give testimony at any war crimes tribunal.

Public opinion and the need for dissemination

Public opinion can be effective in ensuring that IHL is observed. Nations in general do not wish to be seen to be violating international law, especially in the humanitarian and human rights areas. Breaching IHL may result in international censure, or economic sanctions, and the unwanted attention of the international media. A civilian population which is treated badly will only resist all the more fiercely, and an army may even lose support for its military campaign from the public at home.

During the late 1990s, it was the persistence

of individuals, non-government organisations and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement which galvanised public opinion and finally focused the attention of governments on the issue of anti-personnel landmines. These weapons, scattered across more than 70 countries, contravened IHL principles in that they did not distinguish between combatant and civilian. Their blasts caused horrific, unnecessary and permanent injury. The negotiation in September 1997 of the 'Ottawa Treaty' which banned the manufacture, use, transfer and stockpiling of anti-personnel mines, is testament to the way a groundswell of public opinion can bring about meaningful change in international law.

A similar process began in Oslo, with a joint humanitarian move against cluster munitions. In layman's terms a cluster munition is a bomb that contains as many as 600 bomblets, often the size of a soft drink can. In mid-air the bomb canister splits open, spraying bomblets at high velocity and causing maximum damage over wide areas – again, there is no distinction between targets. Making matters worse many bomblets do not explode, and, like landmines, they lie buried in sand, mud or snow or floating down rivers, contaminating farm land and endangering those going about their daily business for years after hostilities have ended. Though medical and rehabilitation assistance for victims will be needed for decades, nevertheless the humanitarian world was finally able to celebrate a victory when a ban on cluster munitions was negotiated in Dublin in 2008.

With numerous armed conflicts raging around the world today, IHL rules are more relevant than ever. Australian Red Cross is firmly committed to a continued and strong dissemination program about IHL's content and values.

Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can only be one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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